

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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PRESS RELEASE

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EXPERIMENTAL FILMS AND VIDEOTAPES EXHIBITED IN ILLUMINATIONS: THE ART OF LIGHT

Films and videotapes by artists--all exploring the possibilities and effects of light, pushing the media far beyond their customary boundaries--are part of the special exhibition Illuminations: The Art of Light, at The Cleveland Museum of Art. They offer a selection of 20th-century avant-garde experiments with the moving image as well as startling new images.

Four artists are represented by films. The "old master" among them is Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), who with his wife Sibyl documented his famous luminous-kinetic sculpture, titled Light Space Modulator (Lichtrequisit), of 1922-30, in a brief film, Light Play: Black-White-Grey. A photograph of the fragile sculpture is exhibited in the gallery, as well as one of Moholy-Nagy's photographs.

Contemporary artists whose films are included are Keith Sonnier, Richard Serra, and Robert Morris, who are also sculptors and sometime performance artists. (Sonnier's neon and glass sculpture, Dyad II, hangs in the exhibition gallery.) These artists worked primarily with video technology--usually early, low-budget, half-inch, black and white equipment--then transferred the results to film. The films are important for their evocation of the severe, materialistic formalism of much American art, especially sculpture, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Just as sculpture of the time stressed the "real" nature of sculptural materials--weight, mass, density, location--these films emphasized real time, light, movement, the boundaries of the frame.

2-experimental films and videotapes

Five artists are represented by videotapes: Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman, Nan Hoover, Norie Sato, and Ed Rankus. Each has pioneered in the use of the electronic media to express a personal vision, whether Rankus's mysterious and somewhat sinister one, Paik's sly insights into American popular culture, or Nauman's brazen, often sexual, humor. The videotape by Paik, Global Groove, sharply contrasts with his abstract television sculpture, Zen for TV, in the exhibition gallery, while Nauman's neon sculpture, Double Poke in the Eye, has much the same tone as his videotape work. Like the films, these videotapes are the artists' attempts to wrest television and film from the commercial conventions of the entertainment industry, and to explore the limitless capacity of electronic media to repeat and "feedback" historical time into the viewer's present.

These films and videotapes, as well as the gallery installation of Illuminations: The Art of Light, are supported by a grant from the Columbian Boiler Company. The entire exhibition was organized by Ray Langenbach, assistant curator in the Education Department of The Cleveland Museum of Art. Mr. Langenbach has written explanatory labels for the gallery and will introduce the first showing of each videotape.

A complete annotated schedule of films and videotapes is attached.

3-experimental films and videotapes

FILMS

All Wednesday films will be shown in the Lecture Hall, all Saturday films in Gartner Auditorium. Each film precedes a feature film also chosen for its relationship to the exhibition's central idea of light as both medium and metaphor.

- Sat/Oct. 3 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), Light Play: Black-White-Grey, 1929-30, b&w, 6 min. Laszlo and Sibyl Moholy-Nagy filmed his famous light sculpture, titled Light Space Modulator, in action. The moving sculpture is made of highly reflective polished metal and glass pieces on a circular base and powered by an electric motor, causing endless changes of reflection and shadow. Moholy-Nagy built the sculpture over nine years (1921-30) while he was working at the Bauhaus in Germany. The fragile sculpture is now housed at the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard, where it is rarely activated. Therefore this brief film, from the Film Archives of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, is the only way to see the machine as Moholy-Nagy meant it to be seen.
- Wed/Oct. 7 Keith Sonnier, Lightbulb and Fire, 1971, b&w, 21 min. Kinescope. Black light, luminous paint, and no narrative, as Sonnier turns off and on a light bulb, paints his body, and sprinkles and ignites flammable powder.
- Wed/Oct. 14 Richard Serra, Color Aid, 1971, color, 36 min., sound. Camera: Robert Fiore. In real time it focuses, close up, on Serra's hands gradually peeling layer after layer of Color Aid cards--saturating the camera frame and the viewer's retina.
- Sat/Oct. 17 Keith Sonnier, Positive Negative, 1970, b&w, 12 min. Performer: Tina Girouard. Kinescope. Shot with sophisticated studio equipment and technicians, this video transferred to film points toward digital video effects of artists such as Sato and Hoover, nearly a decade later, while maintaining the tight formal minimalist approach.
- Wed/Oct. 21 Keith Sonnier, Painted Foot: Black Light, 1970, b&w, 16 min., sound. Kinescope. Transferred from half-inch videotape to film--to duplicate the feeling of the original performance in large-scale video projection--the piece stars Sonnier's foot again, this time covered with paint and lit by strobe and black light.

4-experimental films and videotapes

- Sat/Oct. 24 Robert Morris, Mirror, 1969, b&w, 9 min. The sculptor holds a mirror and walks in a circle across a landscape, which is seen alternately reflected in the mirror and in its natural state. Deceptively simple, the short film is formally complex and relates to Morris's mirrored sculptures of the same period.
- Wed/Oct. 28 Light Play: Black-White-Grey. See Sat/Oct. 3
- Sat/Oct. 31 Keith Sonnier, DIS-PLAY, 1969, b&w, 11 min., sound. Camera: Richard Landry. Performers: Tina Girouard, Michael Kern. Kinescope. Two performers control the light with a large theatrical scrim--in effect, a large light shutter--while a slide projector throws white light across their bodies and off mirrors. Another film made from half-inch video.
- Sat/Nov. 14 Keith Sonnier, Foot and Strobe Light, 1970, b&w, 8 min., sound. Camera: Richard Landry. Performer: Tina Girouard. Kinescope. Feet in stockings, beating over and over on a foam rubber block and bathed in strobe and black light. Reduced from 60 minutes, the film's sound track includes the breathing and moans of an increasingly exhausted performer.

VIDEOTAPES

All videotapes will be shown in the Audio-Visual Center.

First three weekends in October: Sat/11am and Sun/2:30pm

Last two weeks in October: Tues through Sun/continuously, during Museum hours

- Sat/Oct. 3 Nam June Paik, Global Groove, 1973, color, 30 min. An anthology of Paik's previously recorded short bits mixes entertainment with Paik's experiments with music, color, and video effects.
- Sun/Oct. 4 Bruce Nauman, Manipulating a Flourescent Tube, 1968, b&w, 60 min. Nauman said he tried to make his body and the four-foot tube "equal formal elements, just...shapes."
- Sat/Oct. 10 Nan Hoover, Selected Works, 1978-82, color, 39 min.
- Sun/Oct. 11 A compilation of works concentrating on the subtle and exquisite effects of light.
- Tues/Oct. 19 Norie Sato, Selected Tapes, 1979-85, color. Short, experimental tapes manipulating the video medium: light at the edge of the screen, after-images, "snow," "dropout," and other electronic effects.
- thru
- Sun/Oct. 25

5-experimental films and videotapes

Tues/Oct. 26 Ed Rankus, Naked Doom, 1983, b&w. Mysterious, dark corridors,
thru
Sun/Nov. 1 half-revealed bodies, a man, a gun, dice, exposed by abstract
and almost palpable light, evoke the internal illumination of
memory.

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